Metal Men ™&©1993 DC Comics, ARR.

Superman's Return Is In the Cards

August 26th is the day that Superman returns in the pages of ***Superman #82***—and in the newest series of DC cards from SkyBox. The plan behind Sky Box's new ***Return of Superman Trading Cards*** should sound very familiar to anyone who remembers the release of the ***Death of Superman Trading Cards*** last November: the hundred-card series is being released simultaneously with the release of the comic that serves as the inspiration for the card set.

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Reader interest in the ***Reign of the Supermen*** storyline is reaching a fever pitch as the story arc nears its climax; readers across the country have their own theories as to just who the true Superman will turn out to be. ***The Return of Superman Trading Card Series*** will serve as a complement to the longrunning storyline; according to George White of SkyBox, the one hundred regular card "provide an artistic and editorial summary of the incredible Superman saga from his death at the hands of Doomsday, through the Reign of the Supermen, and up to and including the revelation of the one true Man of Steel."

The series will be supplemented by four foil-enhanced bonus cards, each featuring a different work of original art of the one true Superman by the four Superman creative teams; these four bonus cards share a common background and together form a 5" x 7" puzzle. The cards are certain to be highly collectible; SkyBox is producing only 10,000 individually sealed and numbered twelve-box cases, meaning that these cards should prove almost as rare as the original ***Death of Superman Trading Cards*** (and if you don't know how rare that is, try to track down a box!).

The Return of Superman Trading Cards, priced at $1.25 per pack, are scheduled for August 25th release—but don't look for them to be around too long after that!

by CLIFF BIGGERS

Metal of Honor

For over three decades, readers have thought of the Metal Men as nothing more than state-of-the-art robots—but there may be a bit more behind that reflective facade than anyone ever expected!

Metal Men, the new four-issue limited series from Mike Carlin, Dan Jurgens, and Brett Breeding, reveals new information about the origins of the Metal Men, filling readers in on not only who the heroes are, but who they were... The revelation is a stunner for the Metal Men as well as for readers, and it results in the departure of half the original team. And once the group goes its separate ways, it looks like it's the perfect time for the Missile Men to launch an open attack against the group.

Metal Men is a dramatic new series by the creators responsible for the landmark ***Superman #75***. The first issue, complete with a metallic foil-enhanced cover (how appropriate!), is priced at $2.50; look for it on September 9th. Subsequent issues are priced at $1.25 each and follow every month through December.

by WAYNE LEE

Firearm Takes Aim On Comic Shop Racks

From the beginning, Malibu's new Ultraverse books have focused on ultra-humans; that's not the case with ***Firearm,*** however. This new title instead looks at a normal man who's having to adapt to life in an ultranormal world.

Alexander Swan: Firearm, written by James Robinson and illustrated by Cully Hamner and John Lowe, chronicles the exploits of a man whose life has been quite adventurous; formerly a soldier in the Special Boat Service, then an agent for a top-secret British intelligence agency, Swan has now settled into a relatively safe job as a private investigator in America. At least, it seems relatively safe until ultrahumans turned his plans upside down.

"I'm trying to portray someone who's a tired, battered warrior whose conscience makes him stay in this racket that he obviously wanted to get away from," writer James Robinson said. Swan relocates to California to rebuild his life; his routine private investigation agency somehow becomes a magnet for case after case involving ultrahumans, and soon Swan's career takes turns he never anticipated. "He's constantly punched around and beaten up," editor-in-chief Chris Ulm said, "and finds himself the focus of all these cases because of his past associations and unique skills."

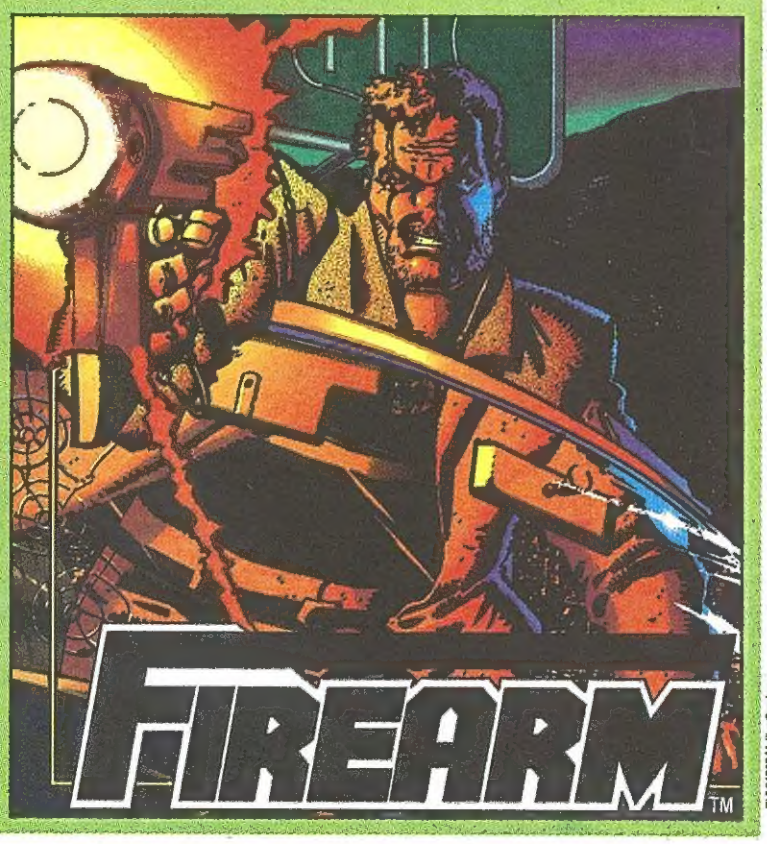
James Robinson wants to make it clear to all Ultraverse readers that ***Firearm*** isn't an Ultraverse version of the Punisher, a vengeful "grim 'n' gritty" killing machine . "He's someone with flaws," Robinson said. "He's someone who aches and hurts... he's perpetually aghast by the fantastic situations he sees around him and the fantastic state of the world he's in... Every case he takes seems to slowly crescendo into some weird encounter with ultrabeings and horror and fantasy—all the things he doesn't want to be involved with. He's very much an everyman with a talent for dealing with violent situations, as opposed to somebody who revels in that sort of thing—he doesn't enjoy it." Robinson feels that, in some ways, Alexander Swan has a great deal in common with Denny Colt, the Spirit. "The Spirit is very much an everyman: all he has is his mask and a pair of fists. All Alexander Swan has is a gun and an ability to persevere."

In the premiere issue of the series, Alexander Swan takes on a routine assignment: bring a bail-jumper back to the office of bail bondsman Ernest Shadrack. The job is a little more shocking than it sounds, though, because the bail-jumper is an ultrahuman who can shoot electrical blasts from his hands. No sooner does he complete this current assignment than he gets a job involving a missing person—and once again, an ultrahuman is involved.

Alexander Swan: Firearm #1, a $1.95 comic, is scheduled for September release.

Firearm is also the focus of a unique project from Malibu/Ultraverse: for the first time, a story will begin as a live action videotape and end as a 32-page full color comic. The ***Firearm #0/Firearm Video*** package pits Alexander Swan against a demonically-possessed assassin on a movie set. James Robinson will write both the video and the comic; the two will be packaged together for only $14.95. This unique zero-issue comic with a foil-enhanced cover will only be available with the videotape, making this one of the more unusual comics collectibles ever produced. ***Firearm #0*** is also scheduled for September release.

by CLIFF BIGGERS



Barefoot Gen Completes His Journey

There are all too few comics that truly deserve the appelation "graphic novel"—Art Spiegelman's ***Maus,*** Will Eisner's ***Signal From Space,*** and Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's ***From Hell*** come immediately to mind. One other book that belongs in that elite company is ***Barefoot Gen,*** the stunning autobiographical *tour de force* by *Keiji Nakazawa* that depicts life in Hiroshima beginnjing just prior to the dropping of the first atomic bomb and proceeding through the weeks afterwards. The work has been universally praised as an example of comics at their best—but American readers have been at a disadvantage, for only three-quarters of the story has thus far been translated into English (there has also been a brief comic book retelling of the story entitled ***I Saw It!,*** but as powerful as it is, it still lacks the strength and pathos of the full work).

This fall, after several years of preparation, New Society Publishers is finally releasing the last volume in the ***Barefoot Gen*** series: ***Out of the Ashes.*** This 288-page book shows Gen's efforts to feed and shelter himself and his mother in the aftermath of the nuclear holocaust. It's a powerful, moving, and sometimes repulsive story—and it's certainly one of comics' finest works. ***Barefoot Gen: Out of the Ashes,*** the fourth volume, is being released in October as a $12.95 trade paperback and a $39.95 hardcover. For fans who haven't read the earlier volumes, New Society is also releasing a four-volume boxed set featuring the entire saga in trade paperback for only $45.95.

by CLIFF BIGGERS

COMIC SHOP NEWS™
8 • 25 • 93

From Your Friendly Neighborhood Comics Outlet
Printed on 100% Recycled Newsprint

A Revolution-ary Revision of American History

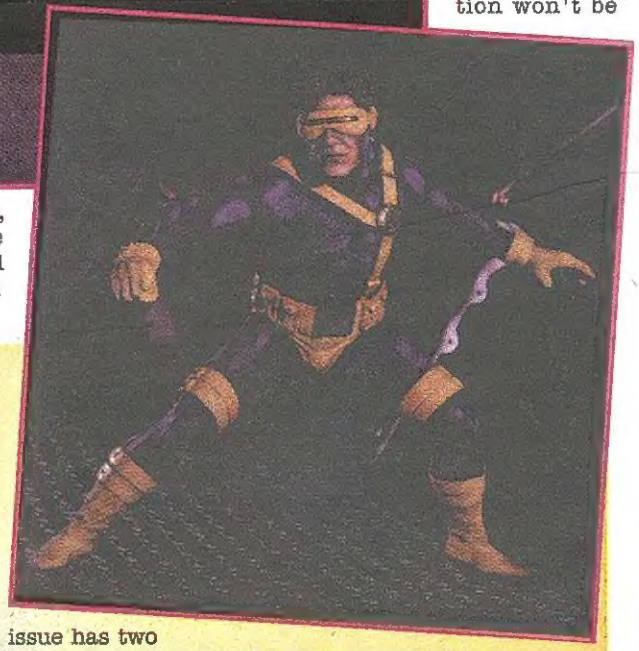
American history is replete with dramatic images that exemplify the revolutionary spirit of our nation's early days. We all have mental images of Paul Revere's late-night ride to warn the colonists of the British approach; Patrick Henry's fiery oration before the Virginia House of Burgesses; Thomas Jefferson presenting his original draft of the Declaration of Independence to the Constitutional Congress; Benjamin Franklin flying his kite in a thunderstorm; and George Washington summoning up a demon to assist the American colonies in their struggle for freedom from England.

Wait a minute!...

If that last image doesn't seem to fit in with anything you remember from your history classes, then obviously you weren't using *Jim Hudnall* and *John Ridgeway's* ***Chiller*** as your textbook. This two-issue prestige-format limited series starts with the premise that Washington called on some rather questionable metaphysical aid to win the Revolution; from there, we quickly jump ahead a couple of centuries and discover that the demon that Washington invoked has been accidentally set free. This time, though, he's a free spirit, under no one's control—unless a mystic named Brian can use his Chaos magic to bring the demon under control. ***Chiller #1***, a $7.95 comic, is scheduled for September 23rd release.

A Pair of Most X-Cellent Vinyl Kits

Horizon, the company responsible for many of the best model kits in the market today, has a pair of new figures designed to thrill mutant fans. This September, Horizon will unveil its ***Cyclops Vinyl Model Kit*** and its new-costume ***Wolverine Vinyl Model Kit***; each kit is molded in 1/6 scale, standing between nine and ten inches tall (and if you've done some quick mathematical computations and have determined that this means that Cyke and Wolvie are only four and a half to five feet tall in real life, don't be misled: each figure is molded in a dynamic pose rather than standing upright at full height). Each highly detailed kit is priced at $45; if you've already decided that your X-Men collection won't be complete without the pair, you might want to reserve both models at your local comic shop... and tell 'em that ***CSN*** sent you!



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Not Your Ordinary Superhero Adventure

U.N. Force Files #3 certainly isn't just another superhero slug-em-up; this issue has two stories that offer a very different look at the world of super-powered adventurers. In the lead story, U.N. Force member Diabla has to come to terms with the news that one of her teammates is HIV-positive; the story is co-written by *Ingrid Tarrant*, who is HIV-positive and thus very knowledgeable about the different reactions many people have once they learn that a friend has the disease. *Steven Butler*, artist of ***Silver Sable***, supplies the pencil art for this issue, while *Aubrey Bradford* handles the inking honors. The second story, written by *Brent Dorian Carpenter* and illustrated by ***UN Force*** artist *Paul Kowalski*, stars Mime, a gay member of UN Force , who must confront a child-molesting priest. ***U.N. Force Files #1,*** a $2.95 comic, is scheduled for September release. A $5.95 limited edition featuring a new cover, signatures from the book's creators, and supplemental text material giving background information on AIDS, is also available.

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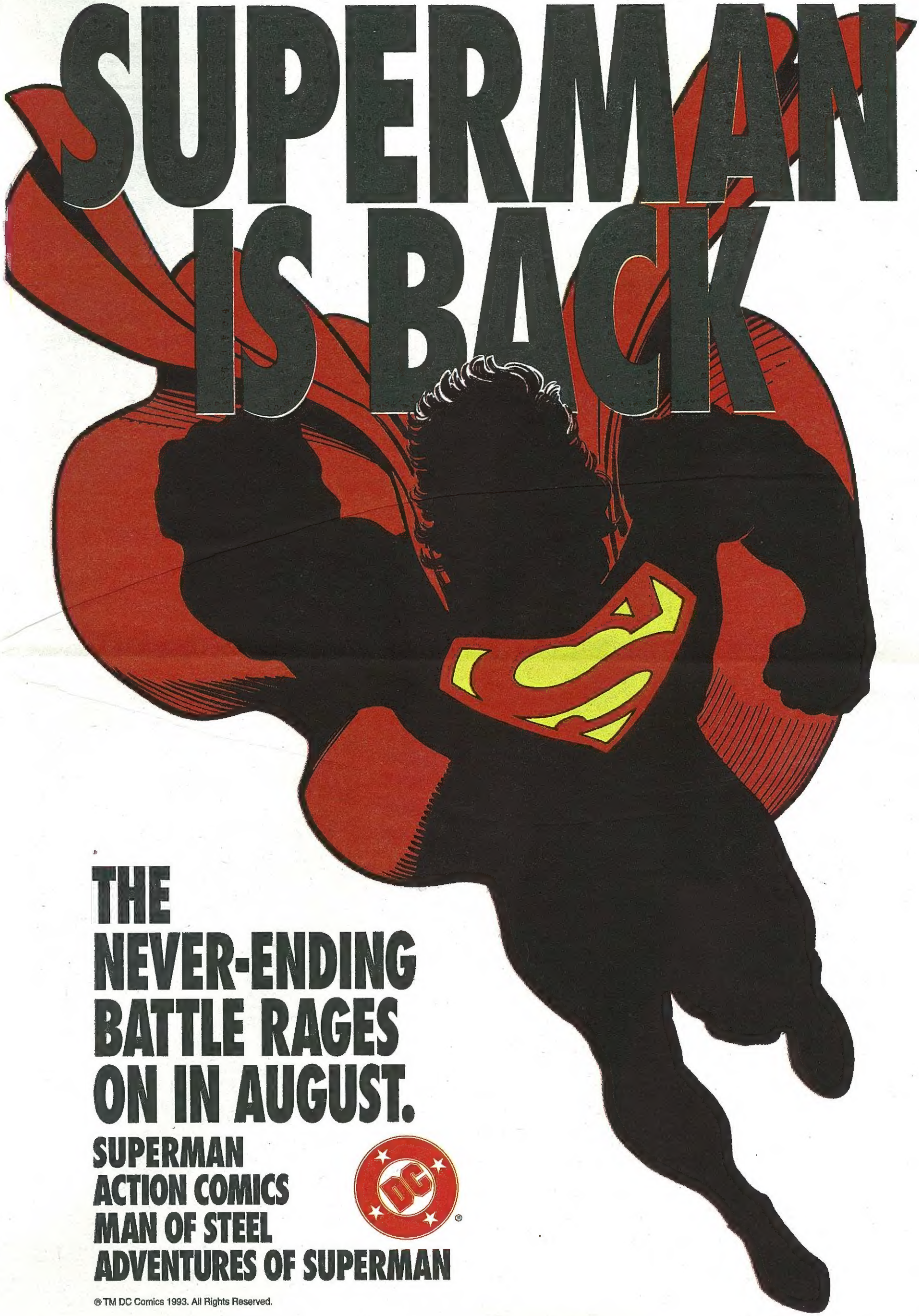
SUPERMAN IS BACK



THE NEVER-ENDING BATTLE RAGES ON IN AUGUST.

SUPERMAN
ACTION COMICS
MAN OF STEEL
ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

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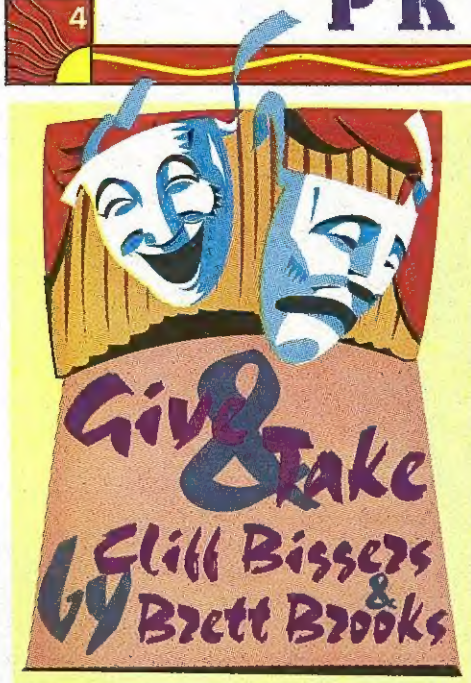
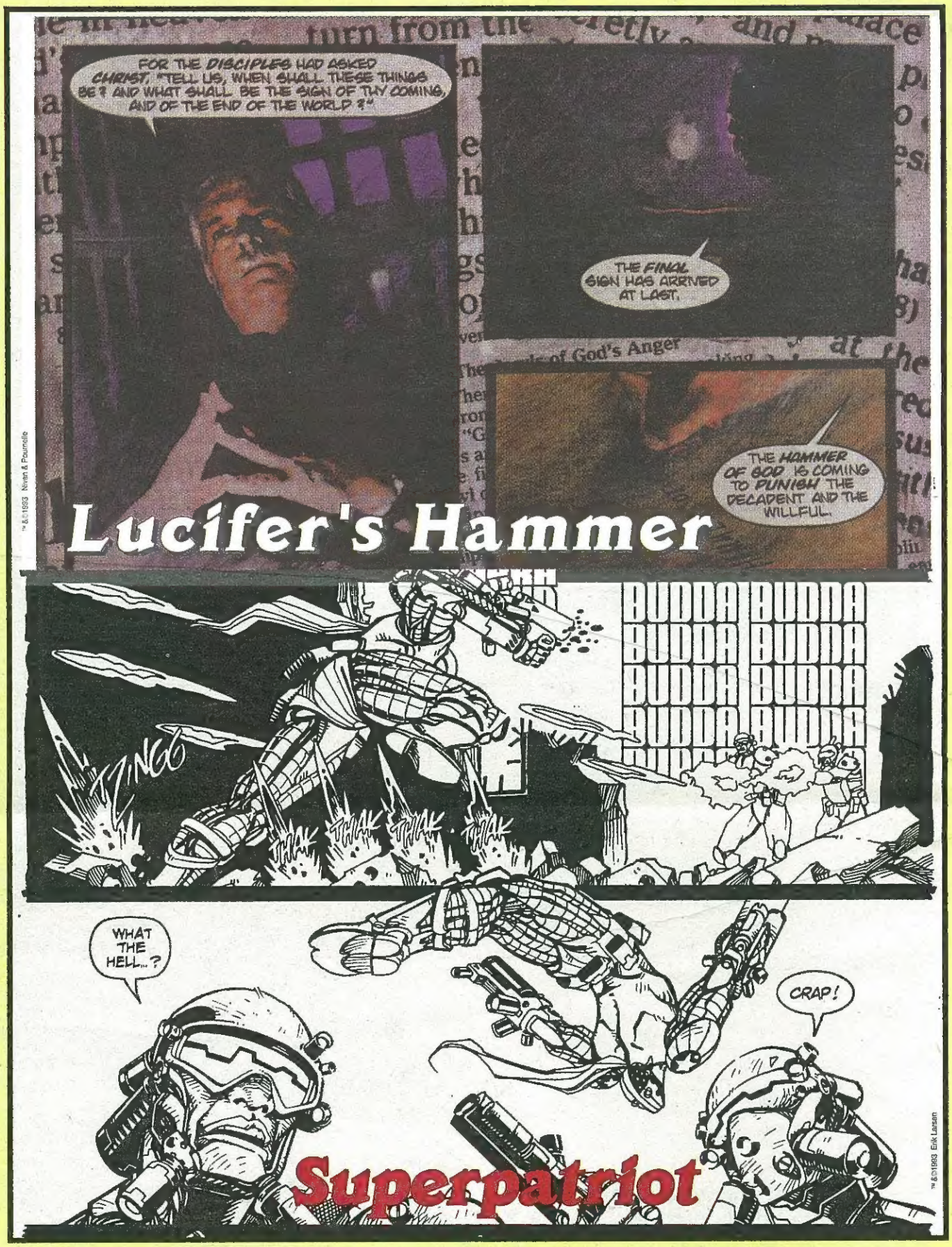


Each month, Cliff Biggers (in plain type) and Brett Brooks *(in italic type)* take a look at a few choice comics scheduled for release in the next few weeks. Publishers interested in having their books considered for review in this feature should send copies to ***CSN Give & Take, 2339 Milstead Circle, Marietta GA 30066.*** We'd prefer receiving copies of the books at least thirty days before they're scheduled to reach comic shops. Enough business—let's talk comics!


FOR THE DISCIPLES HAD ASKED CHRIST, "TELL US, WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE? AND WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN OF THY COMING, AND OF THE END OF THE WORLD?"
THE FINAL SIGN HAS ARRIVED AT LAST.
THE HAMMER OF GOD IS COMING TO PUNISH THE DECADENT AND THE WILLFUL.
Lucifer's Hammer
BUDDA BUDDA
ZINGG
THAK THAK THAK
WHAT THE HELL...?
CRAP!
Superpatriot

Producing an effective apocalyptic tale requires the author to walk a fine line: while there's the inevitable temptation to make the story grandiose and epic in order to communicate the enormity of the disaster at hand (nuclear holocaust, earthquake, flood, meteor strike, or whatever), it's necessary to keep the story focused on a small number of believable characters so that readers have a focus, a person with whom they can empathize. In film, Irwin Allen virtually mastered this form in the 1970's, producing one successful disaster film after another; in novels, authors such as Robert A. Heinlein, Piers Anthony, and Frank Herbert have produced powerful tales by maintaining the balance between the big picture and the personal viewpoint.

But it's hard to think of a novel that maintained that balance much more effectively than ***Lucifer's Hammer***, the Larry Niven-Jerry Pournelle tale of a comet-strike on our modern-day Earth. The novel broke out of the science-fiction ghetto to become a major mass-market seller upon release because it turns such a cosmic event into such a personal struggle.

If you haven't read the novel, you certainly should—but whether you have already read it or not, you'll be very pleased with Innovation's miniseries adaptation of the Niven-Pournelle work into comics form. Terry Collins has painstakingly adapted the novel while maintaining its pacing; he resisted the urge to rush to the disaster itself,giving the readers sufficient time to get to know the characters. Oh, there may be some fans who'll criticize the adaptation for not jumping to the comet-strike more quickly—but these are the same people who complain because Steven Spielberg doesn't fill the ***Jurassic Park*** screen with dinosaurs five minutes into the film.

Well, I haven't read the novel, but I can attest to the quality of the work in general. This is a series that had me tense from the outset. Knowing what was eventually going to happen, I kept expecting some grandiose event to herald the end of the world, but what I got instead was an evenly paced tale that created a very subdued sense of fear.

That pacing is essential to the success of Niven and Pournelle's story; it's through this segment that we develop the concern for the characters that makes the remainder of the book successful.

Nevertheless, that isn't easy to do in a comic; especially when you look at he field as it is today and realize how hard it is not to follow the in-your-face attitude that has been so prevalent lately. ***Lucifer's Hammer*** *is an excellent example of using this artform to create something that exceeds your expectations.*

Vilela's painted art for ***Lucifer's Hammer*** complements Collins' adaptation quite well; the first issue of the adaptation affords Vilela relatively few opportunities to "show off" visually because the bulk of the first issue is character interaction—don't worry, though, the apocalyptic stuff is forthcoming.

Trying to downsize an enormous novel like ***Lucifer's Hammer*** creates the same problems that television writers must overcome when they attempt to translate a best-seller into a teevee miniseries; Collins and Vilela have managed to distill Niven and Pournelle's story without losing any of its crucial ingredients, and the result is some exciting reading.

One of the things that I first noticed about the new ***Superpatriot*** *mini-series from Image is that it really didn't seem that much like an Image comic. Oh, that isn't too say that it was bad, but it didn't fall into that stereotype that Image has seemed to perpetuate lately of having a band of heroes who go out into the world like the greatest thing since sliced bread, with the world either sitting in awe or dread at their approach.* ***Superpatriot*** *isn't about any of that; in fact,* ***Superpatriot*** *seems to be more about the condition of the human being—even though there is very little left human about the Superpatriot.*

Superpatriot *is a four issue limited series by writer Keith Giffen and artist Dave Johnson, with an assist by creator Erik Larsen. The situation is that Larsen wanted to see what someone else would do with his creation, but he didn't want it to get out of hand; the result is that he hired two very talented people to run his character through the gauntlet—with his okay. So, with Eric giving the approval, Keith and Dave have decided to put the Patriot through his paces. The result is a very entertaining book.*

While ***Superpatriot*** isn't an Erik Larsen book, it also doesn't read exactly like a Keith Giffen book; the conspiratorial tone of Keith Giffen's Legion of Super Heroes work is here, but I can't help but feel that Larsen had some input in the direction of this story as well. The result is a book that propels a supporting character into starring status—and it does quite well at that.

The Superpatriot, for those of you who might not be aware, is currently a high-tech operative for a special branch of the U.S. Government, doing all of the dirty deeds that aren't appropriate for groups like Youngblood. Before he had this job though, he used to be a far less "tech" hero, and much more of a man; the question that remains is: how much of the man is there inside the machine? That is the focus that Giffen seems to have put on this series, which features the title character in many scenes, but without any dialogue—at least in the first issue.

Now that you've mentioned dialogue, however, I should mention that one of the only problems I have with this book is the somewhat offputting dialogue style utilized for the scientists responsible for Superpatriot's current state. I reread the first few word balloons before I realized that this was an intentional—albeit confusing—style choice. Otherwise, I am quite pleased with the way Giffen and Johnson have launched Superpatriot on his solo career.

The reason that the Patriot is put into action revolves around a group calling themselves the Sword of the Covenant, a super-secret society bent on world domination—you know the type. Well, they are very serious about their actions, and they don't appreciate everyone thinking that they are some second-rate terrorist operation. So, they think a good opening move is to destroy the Superpatriot, who is, coincidentally, moving in to try to take them apart.

Giffen's story is a first rate adventure tale, but the highlight of the book remains the controversy over the Patriot himself. The battle between differ-

SACHS AND VIOLENS
PETER DAVID
& GEORGE PEREZ

DRAGON LINES II
PETER QUINONES
& RON LIM

LAWDOG VS. GRIMROD
CHUCK DIXON
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HEAVY HITTERS II
THE SECOND ROUND

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ALIEN LEGION:
BINARY DEEP
CHUCK DIXON
& ALCATENA

WAR MAN
CHUCK DIXON
& JUAN ZANOTTO

BRATS BIZARRE
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TONY SKINNER
& DUKE MIGHTEN

TERRARISTS
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TONY SKINNER
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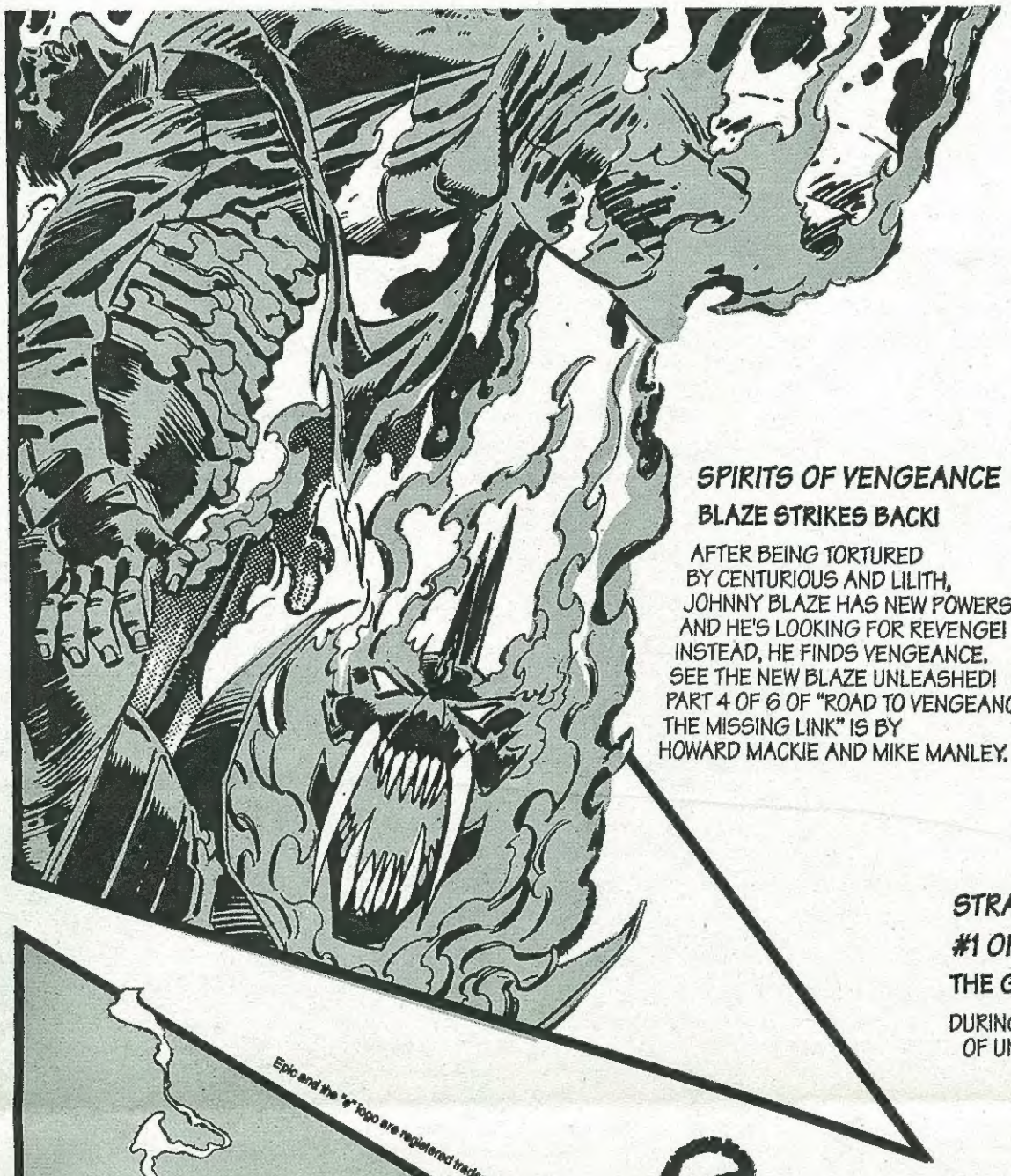
HEAVY HITTERS
ANNUAL #1
EVERYBODY



SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE #15

BLAZE STRIKES BACK!

AFTER BEING TORTURED BY CENTURIOUS AND LILITH, JOHNNY BLAZE HAS NEW POWERS AND HE'S LOOKING FOR REVENGE! INSTEAD, HE FINDS VENGEANCE. SEE THE NEW BLAZE UNLEASHED! PART 4 OF 6 OF "ROAD TO VENGEANCE: THE MISSING LINK" IS BY HOWARD MACKIE AND MIKE MANLEY.

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STRANGE COMBAT TALES #1 OF 4

THE GREATER OF TWO EVILS

DURING WORLD WAR I, THE GERMANS CREATE AN UNSTOPPABLE ARMY OF UNDEAD SOLDIERS. AND THE ALLIES FIND THAT THEIR ONLY HOPE FOR VICTORY LIES IN THE HANDS OF ONE OF THE MOST WICKED MYSTICS EVER TO WALK THE EARTH! AN EPIC LIMITED SERIES WRITTEN BY AUBREY SINGER AND ROB STOFEGA WITH ART BY DAVE MATTHEWS.

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epic comics

HOKUM & HEX #2

BETTER OFF DEAD

BATTERED AND BEATEN, TRIP MUNROE, EARTH'S UNLIKELY CHAMPION, MUST FACE THE ANALYZER. EVEN IF HE DOES WIN THE BATTLE, TRIP WON'T BE IN ANY SHAPE TO STOP THE ALIEN INVASION LEAD BY FELON BALE! RAZORLINE ACTION BY FRANK LOVECE, ANTHONY WILLIAMS, AND ANDY LANNING.

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NEW WARRIORS #40

POWER OUTAGE

SUPERNOVA COMES TO NOVA WITH AN OFFER HE CAN'T REFUSE: GIVE UP HIS POWERS OR HAVE THEM TAKEN FROM HIM WITH POSSIBLY DEADLY RESULTS! A NAIL-BITER BY FABIAN NICIEZA, DARICK ROBERTSON, AND LARRY MAHLSTEDT. AVAILABLE WITH GOLD FOIL COVER OR WITHOUT.

DAREDEVIL: MAN WITHOUT FEAR #1 OF 5

DEFINITIVE DAREDEVIL!

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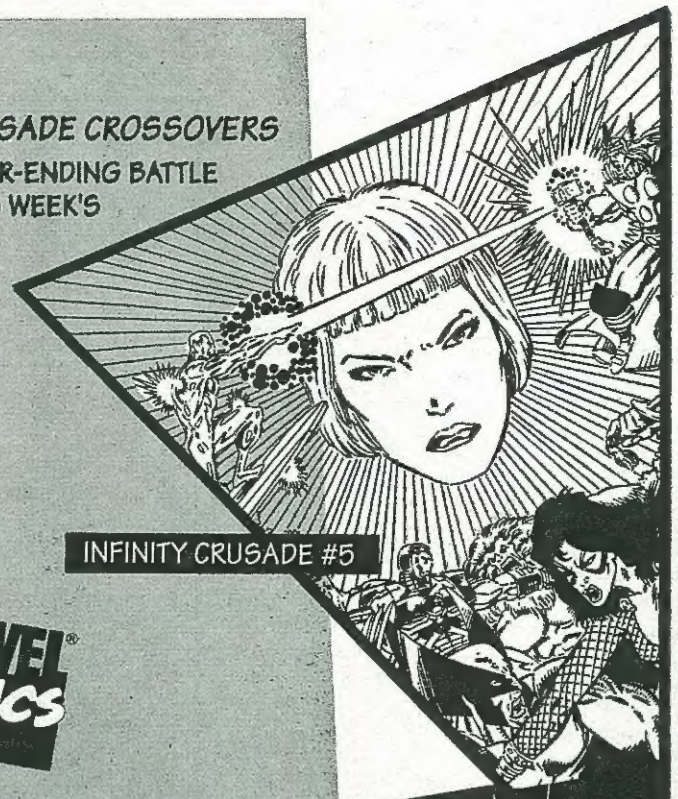
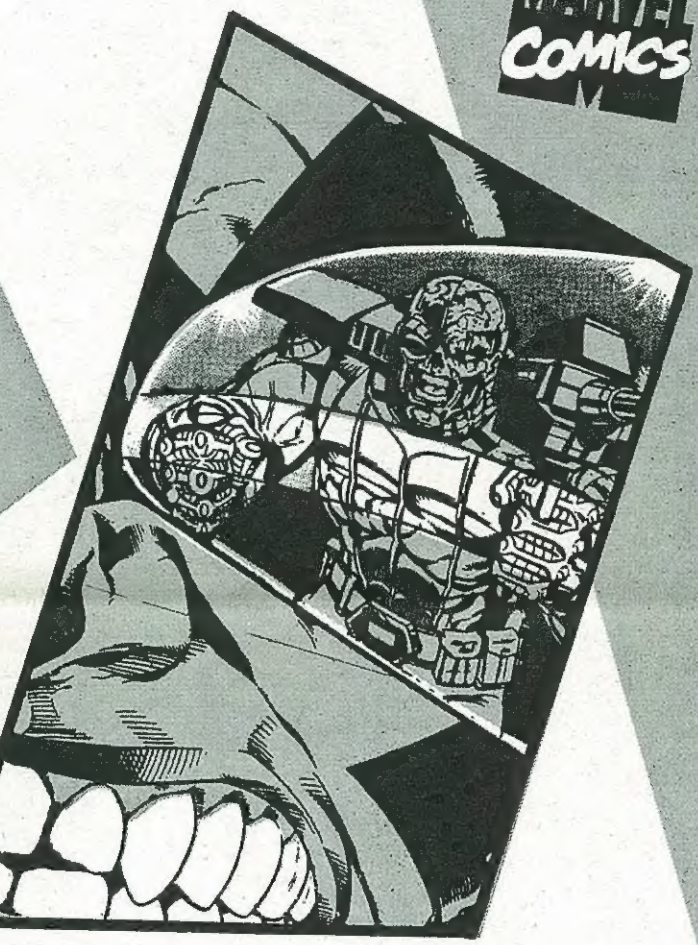


INFINITY CRUSADE #5

MARVEL COMICS



DEATHLOK ANNUAL #2

SUPER STALKER!

ENTER THE TRACER: AN AVERAGE GUY WITH NOT-SO-AVERAGE WEAPONS WHO'S OUT TO KILL ALL SUPERHUMANS. AND DEATHLOK IS HIS FIRST TARGET! BY EVAN SKOLNICK, JOHN HEBERT & MARK MCKENNA. POLYBAGGED WITH A "ROOKIE" TRADING CARD.

DEATHLOK #28

SILVER SURFER #85

THOR #467

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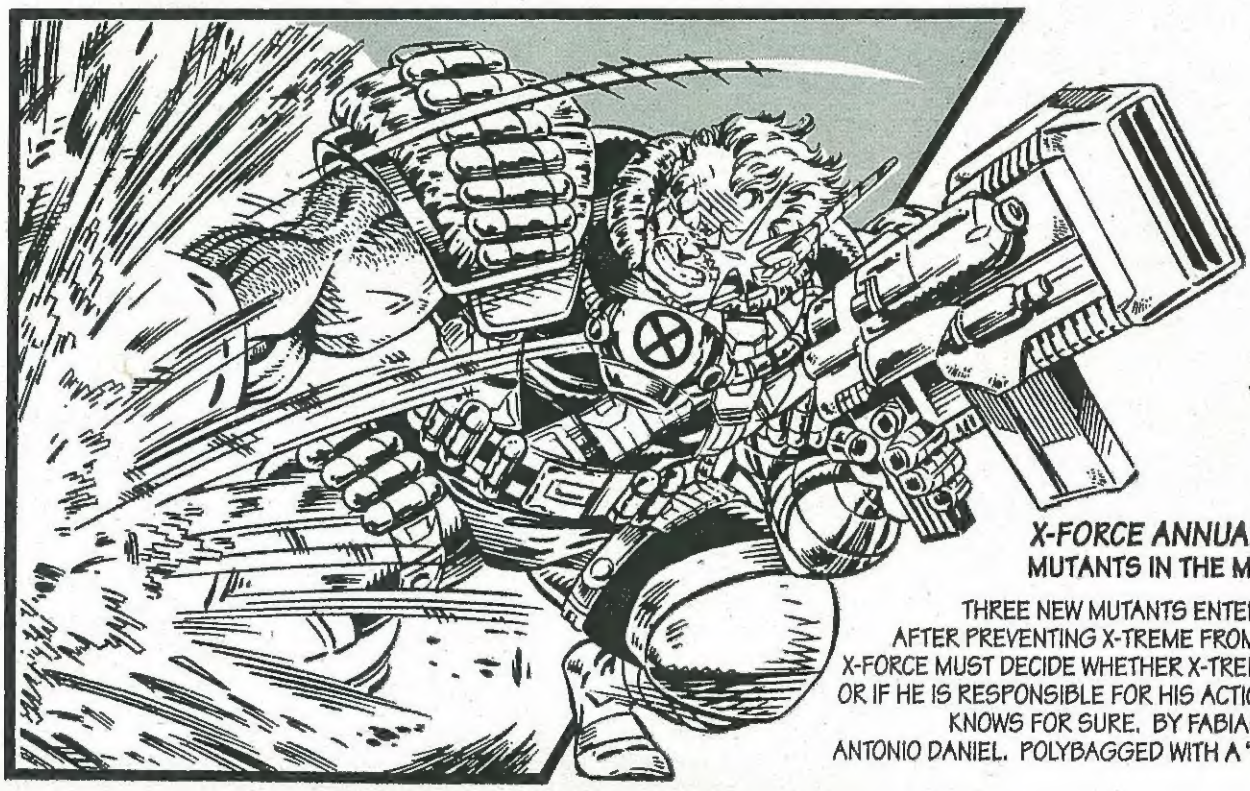

X-FORCE ANNUAL #2

MUTANTS IN THE MIDDLE!

THREE NEW MUTANTS ENTER THE SCENE! AFTER PREVENTING X-TREME FROM KILLING NEUROTAP, X-FORCE MUST DECIDE WHETHER X-TREME IS AN INNOCENT PAWN OR IF HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS ACTIONS. ONLY STRONGHOLD KNOWS FOR SURE. BY FABIAN NICIEZA AND ANTONIO DANIEL. POLYBAGGED WITH A "ROOKIE" TRADING CARD.

ent aspects of the government as to whether the Patriot is indeed at all human anymore, with any rights or desires of his own, or whether his humanity has been destroyed and replaced with an artificial program keeps the tension of the book at a high level. The sub-conflict revolving around corruption in the government, and the ties that it might have to the Covenant of the Sword organization, only adds to the overall feeling of the series.

You can't underemphasize the conspiratorial tone of the book, though. The passages relating to the Sword of the Covenant harken back to other classic comics stories, such as Nick Fury's first introduction to the far-reaching arms of Hydra in the early days of SHIELD.

Dave Johnson's art is superb. This has a very different feel from what Dave is currently producing on DC's ***Chain Gang War*** *series; for* ***Superpatriot****, Dave is inking his own work, and has a chance to show off his talent for creating innovative high-tech artwork. Dave has always said that he wanted to work on a series that was a high-tech espionage book, and* ***Superpatriot*** *has just that kind of feel. Dave's preference for this type of work clearly shows.*

The most impressive aspect of Dave's work here, though, is his ability to portray the dynamic superhero figure. Both his page design and his figure illustration are top-notch; it's hard to believe that this is his first superhero series.

Superpatriot *will probably surprise a lot of people. Those who are expecting a slam-bang action fest aren't going to be disappointed. Those who are looking for a complex, well-written book are also going to enjoy this series.* ***Superpatriot*** *fits well into some of Image's second series of books—such as the excellent* ***Wildstar*** *and* ***Shamen's Tears****—while still holding on to the universe that was set up in the initial releases.*

THAT NIGHT.
IN THE GYM.
IT USED TO BE MATT'S FAVORITE PLACE--
--BUT NOW IT'S FILLED WITH CRIES OF FRUSTRATION-- TEARFUL FURY--
Daredevil: Man Without Fear
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The Eternal Warrior Yearbook
URK-*
DOWN AND OUT... BUT ONE HELL OF A SCRAPPER...
I WONDER WHO HE WORKS FOR. HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ONE OF...
WHAT IN THE...?
"...A PRIEST?"
™ & ©1993 Valiant Publishing

Remember long ago when ***Daredevil*** was a fan favorite? The title has languished below the midpoint on Marvel's sales charts for quite a while, some fans may be surprised to hear that there was a time when this book rivaled the *X-Men* both critically and in terms of sales.

Well, here's a chance for readers to find out why ***Daredevil*** was so very hot—and you don't even have to dig through the back-issue bins. ***Daredevil: Man Without Fear,*** a five-issue limited series, reunites Daredevil with the writer who turned the character around in the early 1980's: Frank Miller. Furthermore, it brings back a Daredevil artist whose work on the character was almost as popular as Miller's: John Romita Jr.

Daredevil: Man Without Fear is the most comprehensive retelling of Daredevil's early days as has ever been done. One of the charms of early Marvel Comics is that each superhero's origin was so high-concept and straightforward that it could be told in a single flashback page every few issues so that new readers understood just who these superheroes were. That sort of high-concept origin was a plus in the early 1960's, when comic readers were more casual and less devoted to their hobby; today, though, readers want more depth and complexity in their storylines. That's what Miller and JRJr present in this limited series: an origin that includes the original Stan Lee-Bill Everett concept, at the same time expanding on it and tying in important characters and events introduced later in Daredevil's career. Elektra, Stick; the Hand, the Kingpin... they're all here (or will be before the series is over).

Of course, Miller isn't exactly a newcomer to the idea of retelling the origin of a character in a new and exciting way, as anyone who remembers ***Batman: Year One*** *can attest. This series has the same sort of impact that Miller's* ***Batman*** *series had: it takes an icon and turns him into a man, and at the same time, it makes the man much larger than life. One difference between* ***Year One*** *and* ***Man Without Fear,*** *though, rests in the age of the characters. In the* ***Batman*** *book, Batman was already an adult who was seeking to overcome his childhood, in the case of Daredevil, we see a child who is learning how to become an adult. Nobody can handle characters like this better than Miller.*

The difference, though, is that Batman's persona had been pretty much defined by others, and Miller had to create Batman's earliest days to fit within the framework of an established character. Not so with Daredevil, though; for years prior to Miller's tenure, Daredevil had very little personality whatsoever.

Miller took Daredevil's basic concept and enhanced it so that a rather simple superhero became a complex human being balancing justice (his law career), vengeance (retribution against those who killed his father, symbolized by virtually every villain Daredevil fights), Christian ethics (his mother), love (Karen and Elektra), and mysticism (Stick and the Hand). While many others have attempted to imitate his complex interpretation of the Man Without Fear, I'm not that convinced that many of them wholly understood how crucial that balance was. Perhaps Miller's masterful return to the character will remind both readers and fellow creators how important each of those elements is.

Miller makes Jack Murdock a much more complex character—and through Jack, we see how Matt became the man he is. He introduces Stick into the mythology much earlier, casting him as a guide to Matt's future role as Daredevil (in a segment very reminiscent of the Luke/Obi-Wan Kenobi sequences of the original ***Star Wars***). Most of all, Miller makes Matt Murdock a believable, compassionate human being in a harsh, uncaring world.

The best part of this series—and that is certainly saying something—was the new take on "Battlin'" Jack Murdock. Before, the character was nothing more than a two-dimensional motivator that fell out of the picture and became almost immediately forgettable. Miller has never forgotten about Daredevil's father though, as you can tell if you go back and re-read any of his earlier involvement with the character (many of which are in print in trade-paperback form, hint, hint). Now, Jack Murdock is a very formidable man...and a very powerful character. It is easy to see how Matt was inspired by his father, and how his untimely death could bring this boy fully into a man.

Miller's story is so wonderful that it's easy to rave about it while saying little about the artwork; that's unfair, because had John Romita Jr.'s artwork for this script accompanied a story by virtually any other writer in the field, it's the art that we'd all be complimenting. JRJr is even better now than he was during his original run on ***Daredevil;*** his visual approach is more graphic, his sense of design is more assured.

He designs the focus and structure of each segment to complement the focus of the interlude: the city sequences are open and unconstrained, the boxing ring segments are tightly focused and confined, the development of the blind Matt Murdock into the radar-sensed Matt Murdock develops from a diffused, soft-focused illustrative style to a sharp, hard-edged high-contrast look. John Romita Jr. is pushing himself to the top of his craft here, making this book as exciting to look at as it is to read.

It doesn't matter whether you read the monthly ***Daredevil*** or not: if you enjoy quality comics, you owe it to yourself to pick up this limited series.

Annual is not a nice word anymore. The lack of worthwhile stories and art that have plagued most of the major companies annuals over the past few years has led many fans to actively avoid anything that has the word annual printed on it. This is the primary reason that Valiant has created the Yearbook...

The Valiant Yearbook is a special issue that is put out on an average of once a year, with a self-contained story. What makes it any different from an annual? Well, for one thing, it's really good. That isn't to say that there hasn't been any good annuals lately, but the vast majority of them are still destroying the reputation of the word.

It's a shame that what was once a highlight of the summer comics line has become an unsatisfying, sometimes embarrassing home to second-rate stories and unproven creators. As you say, there are some noteworthy exceptions to the rule, but they're quite rare—and they shouldn't be.

There's another reason that Valiant has decided to call these yearbooks: they are going to put them out when they are done, and not on a regular once-a-year schedule. This allows for Valiant to create top notch stories using top name talent, and to let the creators work at their own pace until the books are done. And Valiant is off to an excellent start.

The first Yearbook is ***The Eternal Warrior Yearbook*** *by David DeVries and Glenn Lumsden. These are two Australian creators who are probably best known for their work on* ***The Southern Squadron****—that is, until now. This is part of the reason that people used to look forward to annuals. If you've ever talked to fans who have been collecting for a long time, than I'm sure you've heard tales about how great the annuals used to be, and* ***The Eternal Warrior Yearbook*** *is a great example of why.*

The story is about Gilad—the Eternal Warrior—and some of the things that he has done in defiance

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image

of, or in the conflict towards, the religions of the world—most notable Christianity. Now, the time has come to enact revenge, and the revenge comes from a most unusual priest.

For fans who don't remember back to the bygone days when annuals were good, it might be best to compare the Eternal Warrior Yearbook to a graphic novel. Like a graphic novel, it presents a self-contained story that takes place outside of regular month-to-month continuity. Like a graphic novel, it offers a new insight into the character. And like a graphic novel, it features top creators offering a new interpretation of a character they haven't previously written or drawn. DeVries and Lumsden are new to Eternal Warrior—but they're obviously well versed in the character's history, so Valiant fans won't be disappointed.

DeVries and Lumsden give a fascinating perspective into the idea of living forever, and how that can effect your views towards religion and what it preaches. There is no right or wrong presented here, only a contrasting set of views that are balanced out at every chance. The other thing that is presented in this book is violence; not the typical ultra-violence that is found in comics, but the real world violence of war, and death, and maiming. In many ways this isn't a pretty book.

In other ways, though, this is a strikingly beautiful book. The art for ***The Eternal Warrior Annual*** *is remarkable. The harsh reality of the story is perfectly complimented by the dramatic reality of the art. Lumsden uses a style that is very reminiscent of Paul Gulacy, with more than a slight hint of a European style to it.*

** **The Eternal Warrior Yearbook** does just what Valiant promised it would do: it restores the thrill of the annual. Here's hoping some of the other companies follow their lead.*

The Phantom Stranger has been an intentional enigma in the DC Universe. In spite of an almost irresistible urge fans have to learn all about the background of comic book characters, DC has avoided reducing the Phantom Stranger to a simple mystical-superhero-with-an-origin.

Now I get to tell you that ***Vertigo Visions: The Phantom Stranger***, a one-shot by Alisa Kwitney and Guy Davis, offers as much information about the Phantom Stranger's background as any comic produced so far. Don't misread that, though; this isn't an origin story as such, and its surreal nature leaves readers with an enhanced understanding of the character without establishing a definitive origin, secret identity, etc.

What makes this story so successful is the fact that it really isn't about the Phantom Stranger. Characters like this always work best when the mystery remains—as you have pointed out—and the only way for the mystery to remain is if the character stays in the background. If the story focuses too much on the life of the mystery character, then the mystery will eventually vanish. If you keep everyone on their toes, and let them only catch glimpses into the life of the character, then you've succeeded in keeping the mystery alive. It also helps that Naomi Walker is such an interesting character herself.

Kwitney's story is an allegorical tale in which the protagonist, the aforementioned Naomi Walker, journeys through hell as symbolized by a perverse, nightmarish mental institution. There, she meets an old man who she gradually comes to recognize as the Phantom Stranger, and must rely on him to help guide her through a reality far different than what she had ever experienced in the outside world.

Guy Davis, who illustrated the first story arc in ***Sandman Mystery Theatre***, supplies the moody visuals for this mystical storyline. His art is neither superheroic nor cosmic-mystical; Kwitney's script calls for a confined, subtle horror, and that's just what Davis delivers best.

Readers who enjoy the dark-edged supernatural tone of some of the most successful Hellblazer storylines will be very pleased with ***The Phantom Stranger***; it's a compelling horror film in comics form, utilizing one of DC's most underdeveloped characters.

Peter David has long joked about a list of titles that he thought would make great comics. It might not be the best way to start a series, but with Peter David at the helm anything is possible. One of those titles is about to see the light of day: ***Sachs and Violens.***

Sachs and Violens *is the story of a young rebellious model named Juanita Jean Sachs and her favorite photographer, Ernie "Violens" Schultz. Ernie has the hots for Sachs, and Sachs is...well, her own woman. The good news is that Ernie would do anything for J.J. (as Sachs' friends know her). The bad news is that J.J. wants him to help her find out who killed one of her friends. The worst news is that the woman was killed as part of a snuff film—a film where someone is killed while having sex.*

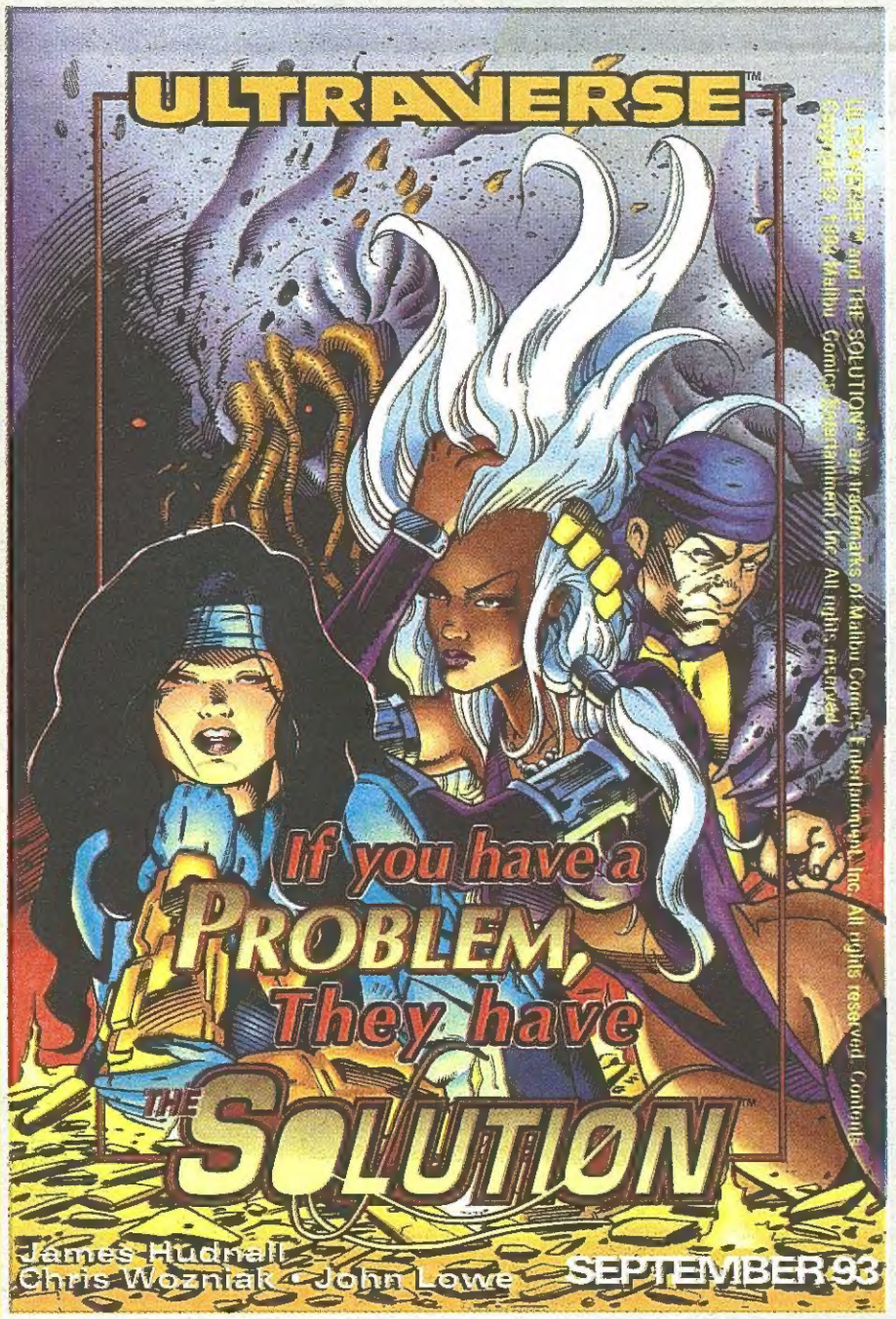
The best news is that Peter David has chosen a great partner to create this tale: George Perez. George has produced some quality artwork to accompany this story, which is part of the second flight of Epic's Heavy Hitters line-up. The story, which is intended for more of a mature audience (as is the rest of the Heavy Hitters line-up) is also a heck of a lot of fun. David and Perez create an interesting partnership that is based around lust and need more than anything else. The two characters are both not perfect, and they are in may ways somewhat repulsive, but there is still that undeniable attraction to their plights. David has also put in plenty of the snappy banter and dialogue that he has become famous for.

Sachs and Violens touches on a question that has become very prevalent in the media recently: why is violence more acceptable than sex? It's a question that the story addresses—and it's a question that Peter David and George Perez deal with on a creative level. The book features relatively little of the over-the-top violence that has become a comics mainstay; it also features no sex, but a lot of implied sexuality. I suspect that the implied sexuality will elicit a great many comments by readers who wouldn't think twice about the typical dose of comics violence found in most books. Just think how much people would complain if comics presented sexuality in the same hyperbolic style they feature violence!...

George Perez's art is well suited for the book. Not only can he draw dynamic action, but he also can illustrate the more subtle moments that are vital to the book.

What can be said about George Perez that hasn't already been said? He is one of the best the industry has seen, and he continues to show people why he has long been considered so. ***Sachs and Violens*** *is typical Perez, and that is a good thing.*

Sachs and Violens *lives up to its very tongue in cheek title. Peter David and George Perez, who are responsible for the fabulous* ***Hulk: Future Imperfect****, have produced another winner here.*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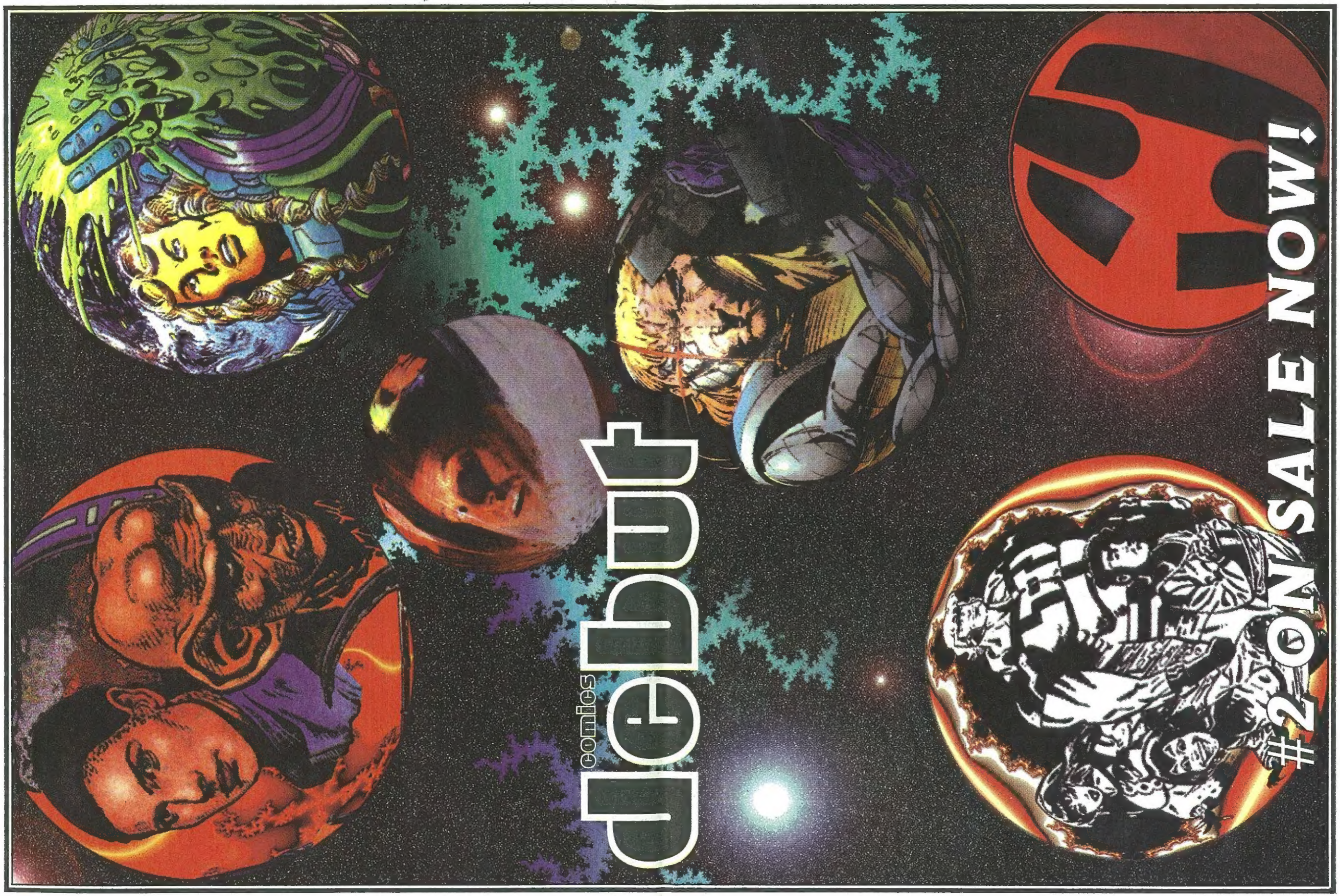


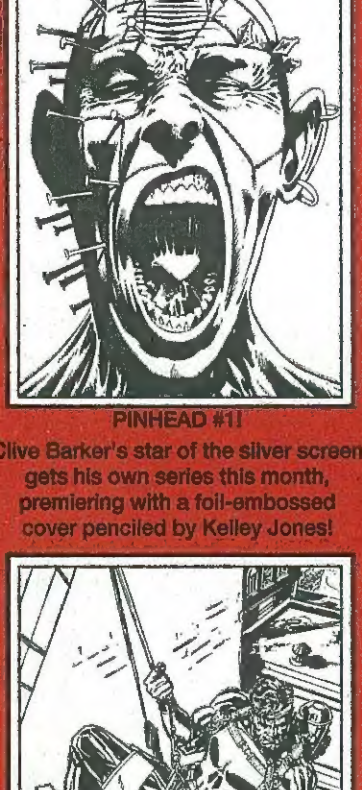
MARVEL HOT PICKS

GHOST RIDER AND THE MIDNIGHT SONS MAGAZINE!

This 48-page extravaganza provides a sneak peek into the "Siege of Darkness" crossover!

DARKHAWK #34!

It's a showdown between Darkhawk and the heinous Mako, while Broderick Bazin's insane quest for vengeance against the Powells continues!



PINHEAD #1!

Clive Barker's star of the silver screen gets his own series this month, premiering with a foil-embossed cover penciled by Kelley Jones!

PUNISHER ARMORY #8!

Frank and Micro Chip unveil a whole new arsenal in 32 ad-free pages!

MONSTER MENACE #1!

This frightful comic reprints a selection of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko's terror tales from the '50s, including "Tim Boo Baa!"

SACHS & VIOLENS #2!

The steam keeps building in Peter David and George Perez's HEAVY HITTER, hitting stores with a bound-in trading card!

MARVEL COMICS

MARVEL COMICS SHIPPING THE WEEK OF OCTOBER 5TH

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